

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

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SUBJ: RECENT SURFACE TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENTS

1. ACCORDING TO LOCAL BUSINESS SOURCES, SERIOUS TRANSPORTATION DIFFICULTIES HAVE BEGUN TO EMERGE IN MOVING CARGO INLAND FROM THE PORT AT ASSAB. WHILE THE TANK WAGON OPERATIONS CONTINUE TO PERFORM AT ADEQUATE LEVELS TO MAINTAIN PETROLEUM SUPPLIES TO ADDIS, A SUBSTANTIAL SHORTAGE OF FLATBED TRUCKS HAS REDUCED INLAND MOVEMENT OF DRY CARGO. THIS SITUATION IS DUE TO A NUMBER OF FACTORS:

A. THE CONVOY SYSTEM WHICH HAS TO BE USED BETWEEN ADDIS ABABA AND ASMARA AND ADDIS ABABA AND ASSAB HAS GREATLY INCREASED THE TIME REQUIRED TO MAKE A ROUND-TRIP BETWEEN THESE POINTS WHICH, OF COURSE, REDUCES THE CAPACITY OF THE TRUCKING SYSTEM.

B. THIS PERCGD (NOV-MAR) IS THE PEAK SEASON FOR TRANSPORTING COMMODITIES. CEREALS, COFFEE AND IMPORTS (SUCH AS FOOD GRAINS AND FERTILIZER) ARE ALL COMPETING FOR THE SAME TRUCKS.

C. THE GOVT IS NOT OFFERING ADEQUATE COMPENSATION FOR THE ASSAB RUN; CONSEQUENTLY, TRUCKERS PREFER TO OPERATE IN OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF SECURITY

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CONSIDERATIONS BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF FINANCIAL INCENTIVES.

D. THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAS DISCONTINUED TRUCKS PURCHASES WHICH PREVIOUSLY AMOUNTED TO ROUGHLY 500 VEHICLES PER ANNUM. THE GOVT SO FAR HAS PURCHASED 150 VEHICLES AND HAS PLANS TO PURCHASE ANOTHER 100 IN THE NEXT WEEK OR TWO. NEVERTHELESS, THE RATE OF EXPANSION IN THE TRUCKING CAPACITY HAS DECLINED COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS YEARS.

2. SOME BUSINESSMEN SUSPECT THAT TRUCKERS ARE INTENTIONALLY KEEPING THEIR TRUCKS OFF THE ROAD. ASIDE FROM THE SECURITY AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS NOTED ABOVE, THESE OBSERVERS ALSO POINT OUT THAT 80-90 PERCENT OF TRUCKS IN ETHIOPIA BELONG TO ERITREANS AND THAT THERE IS AT LEAST THE POSSIBILITY THAT THESE TRUCKS ARE NOW BEING USED FOR POLITICAL REASONS. OTHER OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, DISCOUNT THIS POSSIBILITY ON THE GROUNDS THAT INACTIVE TRUCKS WOULD BECOME CONSPICUOUS AND THEIR OWNERS WOULD BE REPORTED TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES. MOREOVER, THE SPARE PARTS BUSINESS HAS NOT DROPPED OFF BUT RATHER INCREASED WHICH WOULD INDICATE THAT TRUCKS ARE BEING USED AT NEAR OR ABOVE NORMAL LEVELS. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THE LATTER VIEW TO BE CLOSER TO THE ACTUAL SITUATION, ALTHOUGH IT MAY TAKE LONGER NOW TO "REPAIR" TRUCKS THAN WAS THE CASE IN PREVIOUS YEARS.

3. THE RAILROAD BETWEEN ADDIS ABABA AND DJIBOUTI IS PERFORMING AT A CONSIDERABLY GREATER RATE OF EFFICIENCY THAN WAS THE CASE A FEW MONTHS AGO. TURN-AROUND TIME FOR WAGONS HAS BEEN REDUCED BY SOME 15-20 PERCENT. THIS IS PARTLY DUE TO IMPROVED RAILROAD MANAGEMENT AND PARTLY TO REVISED PROCEDURES FOLLOWED BY THE BUREAU OF CUSTOMS. AS A RESULT OF THIS, CLEARING CARGO THROUGH THE PORT OF DJIBOUTI HAS IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY.

4. THE TRANSPORTATION SITUATION IS NOT A PARTICULARLY SERIOUS ONE WITH RESPECT TO INTERIOR MOVEMENT OF CEREALS AND COFFEE BUT IS VERY SERIOUS IN THE CASE OF FERTILIZER BECAUSE FERTILIZER IS STORED IN THE OPEN AT ASSAB PORT AND IS THEREFORE IN DANGER OF BEING RAINED ON WHICH OF COURSE WILL RUIN IT. THE GOVT HAS BEEN INFORMED OF THIS PROBLEM AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL AND IS ATTEMPTING TO COPE WITH IT THROUGH SUCH TECHNIQUES AS FORCING TRUCKERS TO MAKE THE TRIP TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ASSAB IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THEIR RATION OF DIESEL FUEL, STOPPING TRUCKS AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF ADDIS ABABA AND RE-DIRECTING THEM TO ASSAB, AND SIMILAR MEASURES. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, THE GOVT HAS NOT OFFERED FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR THE ASSAB RUN AND MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE UNTIL THEY DO, TRUCKERS WILL PREFER TO OPERATE ELSEWHERE. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT THE PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS ARE SUCH THAT A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION (I.E., TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ALL TRANSPORTATION

REQUIREMENTS DURING THIS SEASON) IS NOT POSSIBLE.

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